



# UNDERSTANDING AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disorder that may involve persistent challenges in social interaction, speech and non-verbal communication, and restricted/repetitive behaviors. The effects of ASD and the severity of symptoms vary in each person. ASD includes several conditions that previously were diagnosed separately: autistic disorder, pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger syndrome.

## FAST FACTS ABOUT ASD FROM THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC)

- » It is estimated that 1 in 54 children in the United States is affected by autism spectrum disorder
- » ASD is about 4 times more common among boys than girls
- » ASD can be detected at 18 months of age or younger
- » There is no cure for ASD

## CAUSES

The CDC continues research on possible causes and risk factors for the disorder. There may be many different factors that make a child more likely to have ASD, including environmental, biological, and genetic factors. Studies so far have shown:

- » Children who have a sibling with ASD are at a higher risk of also having it.
- » Children born to older parents are at greater risk.



- » Individuals with certain genetic conditions, such as fragile X syndrome, Down syndrome, Rett syndrome, or tuberous sclerosis, have a higher chance of having ASD.
- » When taken during pregnancy, certain prescription drugs such as valproic acid and thalidomide, have been linked with a higher risk of ASD.
- » There is some evidence that the critical period for developing ASD occurs before, during, and immediately after birth.

Some people have had concerns that ASD might be linked to vaccines that children receive, however studies show there is no link between receiving vaccines and developing ASD.

## SYMPTOMS

People with ASD often exhibit problems with social, emotional, and communication skills. Some common signs and symptoms may include:

- » Repeating certain actions/behaviors
- » Resistant to minor changes and trouble adapting when routine does change
- » Trouble relating to others or not having an interest in other people at all
- » Avoiding eye contact
- » Desire to be alone
- » Trouble discussing their feelings or understanding the feelings of others
- » Loss of speech or delayed language development

Autism Speaks, a non-profit organization that helps educate and bring awareness of this topic to the public, wants you to know that not all children with autism show all of the signs. That is why a professional evaluation is crucial.

## TREATMENT

No treatment has been shown to cure ASD, however there are intervention services that may reduce symptoms, improve cognitive ability and daily living skills, and maximize the ability of the child to function and participate in the community. Research shows that early intervention services - from birth to 3 years of age - can greatly improve a child's development and result in better outcomes. Intervention services are highly individualized as the way that ASD affects each person differs and may include:

- » Speech Therapy
- » Occupational Therapy
- » Social Skills Training
- » Assistive Technology
- » Discrete Trial Training
- » Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention
- » Pivotal Response Training
- » Verbal Behavior Intervention



## RESOURCES

Understanding the causes of autism and its impact not only on the child but the family is important. To help further the discussion, we've collected some free resources for you to use and recommend reaching out to your local autism organization to get involved.

Autism Spectrum Disorder Brochure

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/autism-spectrum-disorder/index.shtml>

Frequently Asked Questions

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/topics.html>

Screening and Diagnosis

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/screening.html>

Accessing Services

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/accessing-services-for-autism-spectrum-disorder.html>

Tackling Behavior Challenges

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/behavioral-resources>

Family Member Support (Parents, Grandparents, Siblings)

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/support-family-members>